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Child labour and students' academic performance in selected primary school pupils' in Nyahuka town council, Bundibugyo district

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ABSTRACT

The study titled child labor and students' school dropouts was conducted in selected primary schools in Nyahuka town council, Bundibugyo district. The research aimed to identify the main causes of school dropouts, examine the correlation between child labor and students' academic performance, and explore strategies to reduce school dropouts in the area. A descriptive research design was employed, with a sample size of 90 respondents, including teachers, head teachers, and students. Findings revealed that school dropouts were primarily driven by socio-economic challenges, particularly family poverty, engagement in petty jobs, and lack of basic necessities. Additionally, parental education levels significantly influenced students' ability to stay in school, as many parents failed to act as role models or provide academic support. The study established a strong link between child labor and school dropouts, highlighting its negative effects such as limited study time, anxiety, loss of morale, and poor academic performance. The study concluded that poverty compels both parents and children to seek alternative income sources through voluntary and involuntary child labor, which ultimately diverts students from education. It recommended that parents of children engaged in labor receive counseling to understand the importance of education. Moreover, stricter government regulations should be enforced against employers and parents who exploit underage children. Lastly, fostering self-esteem among learners, teachers, and parents was emphasized as a means to promote educational success.

Keywords: child labor, school dropouts, academic performance, parental influence, poverty and education

INTRODUCTION

Child labor is a widespread and complex issue with global implications [1]. However, its nature and impact vary depending on factors such as a country's culture, family traditions, level of development, socioeconomic conditions, and whether the child resides in a rural or urban area [2]. Child labor refers to the exploitation of children through any form of work that deprives them of their childhood, interferes with their education, and is mentally, physically, socially, and morally harmful [3]. While global legislation prohibits child labor, not all forms of work by children are categorized as exploitative. Exceptions include supervised training, family duties, work by child artists, and specific cultural practices, such as those among Amish and indigenous children in the Americas [4]. School dropout rates, on the other hand, reflect the inability of children who are willing to attend school to complete a given level of education. Across Africa, child labor has been identified as a major cause of school dropouts, with one in ten children citing it as the primary reason for discontinuing their education [5]. In some parts of the continent, such as Sub-Saharan Africa, this figure has risen to two out of ten. Industrialized nations also face this issue, as evidenced by China, where rapid economic expansion has resulted in the increased involvement of school-age children in manual labor [6]. Often, these children are engaged in exploitative activities against their will, raising concerns about human rights violations. From a long-term perspective, child labor represents a significant disinvestment in both social and human capital [7]. It limits the development of essential skills, knowledge, and abilities necessary for individuals to contribute meaningfully to society. Africa, home to some of the world's poorest nations, has one of the highest child labor rates globally, with nearly one in four children engaged in labor [8]. Consequently,

school dropout rates are high, particularly in Sub-Saharan Africa, where approximately 29 percent of children leave school due to labor-related challenges [9]. In 2017, more than 50 percent of children aged 5–14 in Mali, Benin, Chad, and Guinea-Bissau were found to be working instead of attending school. Agriculture remains the largest employer of child labor globally, with most affected children working in rural settings or informal urban economies, often for their own families rather than in factories [9]. In Uganda, the introduction of Universal Secondary Education in 2008 sought to alleviate financial burdens on families by covering tuition costs [10]. However, families are still responsible for purchasing scholastic materials, uniforms, and meals, which has exacerbated dropout rates. Many parents remain unconcerned about their children's education, largely due to prevailing socio-economic challenges such as poverty, alcoholism, lack of role models, indiscipline, and child labor [11]. Rather than prioritizing education, some parents encourage their children to work, further contributing to high dropout rates in various parts of the country, including Nyahuka Town Council. In Nyahuka Town Council, reports indicate that school-age children are frequently engaged in labor-intensive activities such as domestic work, tea picking, and street vending during school hours. These activities have become a significant indicator of school dropouts, with girls being disproportionately affected, leading to higher illiteracy rates among them. Government efforts to curb child labor have been hindered by a shortage of law enforcement officers and a lack of awareness about child labor laws among officials. Additionally, some police officers do not fully understand the legal evidence required to prosecute child labor cases, thereby limiting the effectiveness of interventions [12]. Nyahuka Town Council is a rapidly growing urban area where children are increasingly visible on the streets, engaging in petty vending during school hours. Therefore, this study seeks to identify the underlying causes of child labor, gather statistical evidence on its impact, and suggest appropriate interventions to reduce school dropouts. The primary objective is to establish the relationship between child labor and school dropout rates in selected primary schools in Nyahuka Town Council, Bundibugyo District.

METHODOLOGY

Research design

A research design is a plan or blue print of how you intend to conduct the research. Descriptive survey research design was used in this study because it enables the researcher to obtain information that describes existing phenomena by asking individuals about their perceptions, attitudes, behavior and values. This design therefore, deemed appropriate, as it enables the researcher to reach as many respondents as possible within a short time and obtain the real picture as at the ground.

Target population

The target population was drawn from selected from the selected Primary Schoolss all located in Nyahuka Town council, Bundibugyo District, South western Uganda. The study was carried out in three Primary Schoolss which include Basajjabalaba SS, Ishaka Adventist SS, and St. Kagwa High School. The study included ten teachers, three head teachers and 20 students.

Table 1: Showing Target population

Category of respondents	Target population
Teachers	60
Head Teachers	3
Students	**1500**
TOTAL	**1563**

Sample size

Table 2: Showing the sample size

Category of respondents	Target population	Sample size
Teachers	60	**30**
Head Teachers	3	**3**
Students	**1500**	**57**
TOTAL	**1563**	**90**

Sampling Techniques.

Table 3: Showing the sampling Techniques

Category of respondents	Target population	Sample size	Sampling Techniques.
Teachers	60	30	Simple random Sampling
Head Teachers	3	3	Purposive Sampling
Students	**1500**	57	Simple random Sampling
TOTAL	**1563**	**90**	

Data Collection Instruments

The researcher used a self-administered type of questionnaire. This mode of questionnaire was preferred because it collects data in precisely in projected time frame. These questionnaires covered the O" level secondary schools sections which includes the respondent's social economic background (Age, Gender, marital status and religion). This ensured that all the objectives of the study are addressed in the study.

Validity of data collection instruments

For the researcher to be sure that the research instrument is valid, the researcher conducted a pilot study to pre-test the questionnaires before they are administered. This ensured that the research need is clearly identified as addressed by the study objectives. Errors in the instrument were rectified by the supervisor before they are fully administered to the target population.

Reliability of data collection instruments

To ensure reliability of the instruments in order to have credibility in findings, the researcher employed Cronbach's Alpha provided by SPSS. The test score 0.70 and above which is the minimal level, then the instrument was reliable for the study use.

Data collection procedures

An introductory letter introducing the researcher to the selected schools was obtained as an expression of interest to carry out the study. The questionnaire were addressed with a formal consent to ensure the researcher the purpose of the study was obtained from the selected schools and with a clearance from the University. The research obtained a clearance from the Faculty of Education of Kampala International University-Western Campus to further introduce the researcher to the respondents.

Data Analysis Techniques

Data collected was coded and entered using Stratified Packages for Social Scientists. This enabled the researcher to identify missing values as developed from research objectives. The researcher was be able to determine the frequency and percentages. This enabled the researcher to relate the findings qualitatively and quantitatively using tables.

Ethical Consideration

An informed consent form was prepared and addressed to the respondents. This included the freedom to withdraw from the study at a free will and time.

The purpose of the study was explained to the respondents and assured that the information given was treated confidentially and enormity. The benefits/outcomes of the study was explained to the respondents to ensure they feel free to express their view and be assured of their safety and their identities were not to be revealed. Informed consent form was requested from all the participants that agree to participate. During the study, the researcher observed ethical considerations by emphasizing social distancing while approaching the respondents.

RESULTS

Social demographic characteristics of the respondents

Gender characteristics (composition)

Both males and females were fairly represented as indicated in the table below

Table 4: Sex composition of the respondents

Sex	Frequency	Percentages%
Males	28	40
Females	62	60
Total	**90**	**100**

The above table shows that 40% of the respondents were males and only 60% were females.

Age bracket of the respondents

Table 5: All age brackets were considered during the study as tabulated below

Age	Frequency	Percentages%
20-30 years	42	46
31-40 years	26	19
41-50 years	08	11
Over 50 years	14	14
Total	**90**	**100**

The above table indicates that respondents between 20-30years formed 46%, 19% of the respondents were between 31-40 years, 11% were between 41-50 years while over 50 years indicate (14%).

Marital status of the respondents

Table 6: Marital status of the respondents

Marital status	Frequency	Percentages %
Single	16	18
Married	48	52
Widow	12	14
Divorced	11	13
Separated	3	3
Total	**90**	**100**

The researcher found out that 52% of the respondents were married, 18% single, 13%divorced, 14% widowed and 3% separated as tabulated below.

Religious affiliation of the respondents

The religious affiliations of the respondents were as indicated above with Catholics 22 (44%) leading, closely followed by Protestants 18 (36%), Pentecost 6 (12) and the least were, Moslems 2 (4%) as indicated in the table below;

Table 7: Religious affiliation of the Respondents

Respondents	Number of Respondents	Percentage (%)
Catholics	42	46
Protestants	38	40
Moslems	2	3
Pentecost	6	8
Others	2	3
Total	**90**	**100.**

Main causes of School dropouts in selected Primary Schools.

This was objective one of the research studies to establish the Main causes of School dropouts in selected Primary Schools.

Table 8: Main causes of School dropouts in selected Primary Schools

Main causes of School dropouts in selected Primary Schoolss.	A	%	SA	%	D	%	SD	%	UD	%
Low parental level of education (That see no value in education for children)	48	54	42	43						
Poverty and household levels compelling school	90	100								
Academic failures	33	33	57	77						
Pregnancies	46	51	44	49						
TOTAL										

KEY: A=Agree, SA=Strongly Agree, D=Disagree, SD=Strongly Disagree, UD=UD Decided

From the table three above, 38% of the respondents agreed and 43% strongly agreed with Low parental level of education (That see no value in education for children), 100% of the respondents agreed with Poverty and household levels compelling school, 33% of the respondents agreed and 77 strongly Academic failures, 51% agreed and 49% strongly agreed with Pregnancies.

The relationship between Child labor and students' academic performance.

This was objective two of the research study to establish the relationship between Child labor and students' academic performance.

Table 9: The relationship between Child labor and students' academic performance.	A	%	SA	%	D	%	SD	%	UD	%
Child labour prolongs the period in school through repeating	62	74	28	26						
Disturbs mental and psychological stability	33	36	57	73						
Lateness to school and leaving school early	9	12	81	87						
Create laxity and limits concentration	10	12	38	41					42	47
Habitual absenteeism	46	51	44	49						
Attributes to early marriages	23	33	67	77						
TOTAL										

KEY: A=Agree, SA=Strongly Agree, D=Disagree, SD=Strongly Disagree, UD=UD Decided

From the above table, it was revealed that 74% of the respondents agreed and 26 strongly agreed Child labour prolongs the period in school through repeating, 33% agreed and 77 Strongly agreed with Disturbs mental and psychological stability, 12% and 87 % agreed and strongly agreed with Lateness to school and leaving school early, 51% of the respondents agreed and 49% strongly agreed with Habitual absenteeism, 33% strongly agreed and 77 agreed with. Attributes to early marriages while 14% agreed and 40 strongly agreed Create laxity and limits concentration while 46%were not sure.

Strategies to reduce school dropouts

Table 10: Strategies to reduce school dropouts

Strategies to reduce school dropouts	A	%	SA	%	D	%	SD	%	UD	%
Create self-esteem among affected learners.	82	89	8	11						
Gender main streamlining in education from lower levels to higher levels	48	54	42	43						
Create schools for disadvantaged and vulnerable children			90	100						
Massive sensitization for the need for child education	63	76	27	24						
Parental empowerment to push child education	33	36	57	73						
TOTAL										

KEY: A=Agree, SA=Strongly Agree, D=Disagree, SD=Strongly Disagree, UD=UD Decided

From the table above, it was revealed that 76% of the respondent agreed while 24% strongly agreed with Massive sensitization for the need for child education., all the respondents (100%) agreed to Create schools for disadvantaged and vulnerable children, 54% of the respondents agreed while 43 strongly agreed with Gender main streamlining in education from lower levels to higher levels, 89% of the respondents agreed while 11% of the respondents strongly agreed with Create self-esteem among affected learners.

DISCUSSION

The findings of this study shed light on the intricate relationship between child labor and school dropout rates in Nyahuka Town Council, Bundibugyo District. The study explored the social demographic characteristics of respondents, the primary causes of school dropouts, the effects of child labor on academic performance, and potential strategies to mitigate dropout rates. These findings align with existing literature while offering unique insights into localized socio-economic challenges affecting education.

Social Demographic Characteristics of Respondents

The study observed representation across gender, age, marital status, and religious affiliation. The gender distribution showed that 40% of respondents were male and 60% were female. The highest proportion of respondents fell within the 20-30 age bracket (46%), with a smaller percentage (14%) being over 50 years old. Most respondents (52%) were married, aligning with findings from prior research indicating that household responsibilities significantly impact perspectives on education [13]. Additionally, the predominant religious affiliation was Catholicism (46%), followed by Protestantism (40%).

Main Causes of School Dropouts

The study identified several key reasons behind school dropouts, with poverty being the most prevalent (100% of respondents agreed). This finding corroborates an earlier research which emphasizes poverty as a primary driver of child labor and educational discontinuation [14]. Low parental education levels were also a significant factor, as parents who do not perceive the value of education are less likely to prioritize their children's schooling. This aligns with studies by Dubow et al., [15], which highlight that parental illiteracy directly correlates with higher dropout rates. Additionally, pregnancies (51%) and academic failures (77%) were major contributors, reinforcing previous studies suggesting that teenage pregnancy and poor academic performance are significant barriers to educational continuity [16].

The Relationship Between Child Labor and Academic Performance

A strong correlation between child labor and poor academic performance was established. The study revealed that child labor prolongs students' time in school due to frequent repetition (74%) and negatively impacts mental and psychological stability (73%). These findings are consistent with the work of Ibrahim and co 2023), who found that child labor leads to cognitive and emotional distress, reducing a child's ability to concentrate in school. Furthermore, lateness to school and early departure (87%) as well as habitual absenteeism (51%) were common consequences of child labor [17,18], Additionally, child labor was linked to early marriages (77%), a factor also identified by ILO [19] as a major consequence of limited educational opportunities for young girls.

Strategies to Reduce School Dropouts

The study proposed several interventions to address school dropouts, with 100% of respondents agreeing that establishing schools for disadvantaged children is a crucial step. This aligns with policies advocated by Balenzano [20], which emphasize the need for inclusive education systems. Additionally, 89% of

respondents agreed that boosting self-esteem among affected learners would improve retention, a strategy supported by research on socio-emotional learning [21]. Gender mainstreaming in education (54%) was also highlighted as a significant approach. Massive sensitization about the importance of education (76%) and parental empowerment (73%) were also identified as critical measures, reinforcing findings from studies advocating for community involvement in education [22].

Comparison with Existing Literature

The findings of this study are consistent with global and regional studies on child labor and education. Prior research by Fegusson et al., [23] and Desai [24] supports the claim that poverty is a dominant factor influencing school dropout rates. Additionally, the study aligns with ILO's report [19] which emphasizes the negative effects of child labor on educational attainment. However, while previous studies focus broadly on Africa and other developing regions, this study provides localized insights specific to Nyahuka Town Council, emphasizing the urgent need for targeted interventions in this area.

CONCLUSION

The study confirmed that child labor significantly contributes to school dropout rates in Nyahuka Town Council, with poverty and low parental education levels being key drivers. The research also highlighted the detrimental impact of child labor on academic performance and identified various strategies to mitigate dropouts. These findings align with existing literature while offering specific insights into the unique challenges faced in the study area. Addressing these issues requires a multi-faceted approach, including policy enforcement, community engagement, and education sector reforms to ensure that every child has the opportunity to complete their education.

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